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Item 16 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Writing Systems : Romanization

Implementation of UN Romanization Systems by Donor Nations

Submitted by the Working Group on Romanization Systems**

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** Prepared by Paul Woodman, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

New York, August 21-30, 2007

Agenda Item 16(a): Writing Systems: Romanization

Implementation of UN Romanization Systems by Donor Nations

Submitted by the Working Group on Romanization Systems[1]
Convenor: Peeter Päll (Estonia)

Summary

Because of changing national circumstances, a country which has sponsored a donor romanization system subsequently adopted by a Resolution of the United Nations may find it difficult to maintain its own initial firm support for that system. Recognising this reality, the Working Group on Romanization Systems would like to be able to examine the status of resolutions pertaining to an individual romanization system if that system has not been implemented by the sponsoring donor nation within 10 years following the relevant Resolution, or is no longer implemented by the sponsoring donor nation after that same period of time. To this end, a resolution is herewith proposed for the consideration of the Conference.

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1 In the early years of United Nations involvement in romanization systems for geographical names, there was a natural enthusiasm to see as many systems as possible approved as quickly as time would permit. In total, 19 resolutions pertaining to individual languages were approved by the first three UN Conferences between 1967 and 1977; an extraordinarily large number.

2 This initial rush of resolutions was possible because the romanization systems concerned were for the most part ones which had been in existence in their respective sponsoring countries for many years. There was therefore no cause for concern about the crucial need for the stability and implementation of these systems; both criteria had been amply demonstrated over a significant period of time.

3 It proved impossible to sustain this initial rate of progress, and in the five UN Conferences since 1977 only 8 resolutions pertaining to individual languages have been adopted. Indeed, if revisions and amendments are discounted, only two wholly new systems have been adopted since the 3rd UN Conference: those for Russian (V/18) and Greek (V/19). The reason for this slowdown is principally that some of the systems

[1] Prepared by Paul Woodman, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

brought by sponsoring countries to UN meetings since the late 1970s have been newly devised, and have not always exhibited a sufficient degree of national domestic implementation. In such circumstances it is difficult for future stability to be guaranteed, and UNGEGN has necessarily requested that before a resolution can be considered sponsoring countries must first satisfy the criteria of stability and implementation. This request that national implementation and stability be essential preconditions was formally recognised in a resolution adopted at the 4th UN Conference in 1982 (IV/15).

4 Most resolutions on romanization systems are soundly founded and continue to work well. However, it is a fact of life that circumstances do change over the course of time, and it is particularly the case that some resolutions passed during the first flush of enthusiasm in early UN Conferences may no longer possess the firm national backing that their sponsoring countries were able to provide at the time.

5 There would therefore appear to be a need to acknowledge the reality of changing national circumstances, whilst not in any way diminishing the requirements for stability and implementation. This need was recognised by the Working Group on Romanization Systems at its meeting in Tallinn, Estonia, in October 2006. The Working Group agreed to propose to the 9th UN Conference that UNGEGN be permitted to re-examine the status of resolutions pertaining to individual romanization systems in instances where the system concerned has not been implemented ***by the sponsoring donor nation*** in the manner expected, or is no longer implemented ***by the sponsoring donor nation*** to the extent initially understood. To this end, the following resolution is proposed for the consideration of this present Conference.

The Conference,

Recalling that Resolution IV/15 called for the consideration of romanization systems only on condition that the sponsoring nation or nations implement such systems on their own national cartographic products;

Reaffirming the general principle of that same Resolution that systems adopted for international use should not be revised;

Recognising however that, subsequent to the international adoption of a romanization system, the sponsoring nation or nations may, for reasons unforeseen at the time of adoption, experience difficulty in achieving national implementation of that system;

Recommends that the Group of Experts be able to reconsider the relevance of any internationally adopted romanization system which has not been officially implemented by the sponsoring nation or nations within 10 years following the relevant Resolution, or is no longer implemented by that nation or those nations after that same period of time.